

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2780

As Reported by House Committee On:
Children & Family Services

Title: An act relating to early learning and child care programs and services in the state.

Brief Description: Establishing an early learning and child care legislative work group.

Sponsors: Representatives Fromhold, Kagi, Delvin, Quall, McIntire, Chase, Darneille, Conway, Morrell and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Children & Family Services: 1/28/04, 1/29/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Early Learning and Child Care Legislative Work Group to make recommendations for developing a strategic vision and specific goals for early learning and child care programs and services in the state.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Bailey, Dickerson, Miloscia and Pettigrew.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Boldt, Ranking Minority Member; Roach, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; and Shabro.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

In 2000, the Legislature directed the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to conduct a study of the best method for coordinating and consolidating child care and early education programs funded by the state. The Child Care and Early Learning Organizational Study, which the OFM produced in response, provided the following recommendations:

- adopt an umbrella mission statement that captures all child care and early learning programs;
- combine programs with similar or duplicate functions and missions;
- streamline the current configuration by reducing the number of state agencies involved in the child care licensing process;

- assign an interagency task force to examine and reduce the differences in program service standards; and
- coordinate training for providers regarding state agency rules by all programs.

In response to this report, the Office of the Governor undertook administrative action to consolidate child care and early learning programs in the state, the primary component of which was the creation of the Division of Child Care and Early Learning within the Economic Services Administration in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Currently, child care and early learning programs in the state are administered through three state agencies: the DSHS, the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Summary of Bill:

There is established an Early Learning and Child Care Legislative Work Group (Work Group) to make recommendations for developing a strategic vision and specific goals for early learning and child care programs and services in the state.

Members of the Work Group must be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate. Membership of the Work Group must consist of members of the House Children and Family Services Committee, Education Committee, and Appropriations Committee and the Senate Children and Family Services and Corrections Committee, Education Committee, and Ways and Means Committee. Co-chairs of the Work Group must be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate.

The Work Group is required to:

- define legislative expectations and provide policy direction for a statewide strategic plan for quality early learning and child care programs and services, which places early learning and child care within the context of life-long learning;
- identify the most efficient system for the administration and fiscal management of quality early learning and child care programs and services in the state;
- make recommendations regarding consolidation of early learning and child care programs and services in the state; and
- seek involvement from families, community groups, stakeholder groups, and state agencies involved with early learning and child care programs and services throughout the state.

The Work Group will use legislative facilities and staff from the Office of Program Research and Senate Committee Services.

The Work Group is required to report its progress to the Legislature by December 5, 2004, and report its recommendations to the Legislature by January 10, 2005.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Legislation passed the House last year requiring consolidation of early learning and child care programs and services in the state. This bill revisits that issue, with the same vision and goal but through a different vehicle. There is a need for clear goals and policy direction in the state concerning early learning and child care programs and services. This Work Group would provide an opportunity for developing those goals and policy direction, while allowing for flexibility. This mechanism is similar to the one used for the strategic master plan for higher education, which worked quite well. This bill continues work that is already going on in the state. The existing system of child care and early learning programs and services is fragmented, and the effects of that fragmentation are evident. The Work Group must rely on input from parents and providers, and must consider current research and models from other states. Regulations, administration, and funding applying to early learning and child care programs should be simplified.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Fromhold, prime sponsor; Robbin Dunn, Washington State Association of Headstart/ECEAP Programs; Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children; Linda Tyner, Washington Family Child Care Association; Dawn Larsen, Catholic Community Services; Kim Cook, SEIU Local 925; Greg Williamson, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Robin Zukoski, Office of Financial Management.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.